



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
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24 November 2020

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi  
Arab Republic of Egypt  
Fax: +20-2-390-1998

Chancellor Hamada El-Sawy  
Office of the Public Prosecutor  
Fax: 20-2-25774716

Prime Solicitor-General Khaled Diauddin  
Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Arab Republic of Egypt  
Fax: +20-2-26381956

Dear President al-Sisi, Chancellor El-Sawy and Prime Solicitor-General  
Diauddin,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America to express our deep concern regarding the detention of Dr. Ahmed Al Tohamy Abdel-Hay, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Economic Studies and Political Science at Alexandria University. On 3 June 2020, unidentified security forces appeared at Abdel Hay's home in Cairo and took him away. He was held disappeared at the headquarters of State Security in Cairo until 30 June, when he was brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP). He was ordered to remain in pretrial detention in connection with Supreme State Security Case 649/2020. As per this case, Al Tohamy was accused of joining a terrorist group, spreading false news and statements, and misusing social media.

MESA was founded in 1966 to support scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has over 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

The circumstances surrounding the arrest and detention of Dr. Al Tohamy are deeply concerning. He was "disappeared" for seventeen days and held, without access to family or lawyers, before being brought before a prosecutor who then ordered him to be held provisionally for 15 days. That provisional detention has since been renewed multiple times, and at no point has Al Tohamy had access to a lawyer. Furthermore, Al Tohamy was not allowed to see his family until October, nearly four months after his arrest. The accusations against him have become routine in the cases of citizens who exercise freedom of expression in Egypt: "joining a terrorist group, spreading false news and statements, and misusing social media." Nonetheless, his interrogations have focused on his connection with or knowledge of a lawsuit in the United States filed by Egyptian-American activist Muhammad Sultan, who is suing former Prime Minister Hazem Al-Beblawy in American courts, presumably for the mistreatment Sultan endured in Egyptian jails from 2013-2015.

The detention of Professor Al Tohamy is yet another example of what has become a very disturbing, intensifying pattern over the past several months: in an effort to silence the free expression of opinion and thought, especially as it relates to civic life in Egypt, scholars and human rights activists who exercise their rights peacefully are targeted and arrested. More often than not, they face the absurd charge of membership in a terrorist organization or something similar. Furthermore, provisional detentions in these political cases tend to be renewed automatically and repeatedly, such that scholars, writers, and activists have remained in detention for long periods without trial, and often without access to a lawyer.

We call upon you to intervene in these matters and put a stop to the ongoing checks on freedom of speech and expression, and on academic freedom, and to restore free and fair trials in Egypt. We urge you to review the penal code and abolish easily abused counter-terrorism and cybercrime laws that impose unconstitutional restrictions on freedom of opinion, expression, access to information, and research in Egypt. We call on you to drop all charges against Professor Al Tohamy and release him from detention.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Dina Rizk Khoury  
MESA President  
Professor, George Washington University



Laurie Brand  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor, University of Southern California

cc:

Dr. Ali Abdel Aal, Speaker, Egyptian Parliament  
Ambassador Yasser Reda, Embassy of Egypt, Washington, D.C.